

छत्रपती राजर्षी शाहू महाराजांची राष्ट्र उभावणीत भूमिका

संपादक
प्राचार्य डॉ. महादेव गव्हाणे



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राजवैभव थोर असेल,
पण मी रयतेशी
वचनबद्ध आहे.
ती वचनबद्धता
त्या वैभवाहूनही
थोर आहे.

— राजर्षी शाहू महाराज



अरुणा प्रकाशन, लातूर

१०३, ऑलिवर कॉम्प्लेक्स - अ, खर्डकर स्टॉप, औसा रोड,
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Reservation Policy of Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj

□□□

Dipeeka Swami

The many constitutional amendments allowing reservation on economic grounds always generate much interest but the quota system in India is much older. Way before it was enshrined in the Indian constitution, this policy was first implemented by a young raja of farsighted ruler was Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj (1874-1922) of the princely state Kolhapur (karvir). At the Chhatrapati's behest, on 26th July 1902, an administrative order was passed in the Kolhapur state gazette that sent shockwaves across British India. He declared 50 percent reservation in educational institution and government jobs from which only four castes were excluded 1) Brahmin 2) Shenvi 3) Prabhu 4) Parsi All other castes except these were declared as constituting the Bahunjan samaj. This meant in particular that, even if positions reserved for bahunjan candidates remained empty, they could not be filled up with candidates from the 4 excluded castes.

The 1902 notification says: His highness is pleased to direct that from the date of this order 50 percent of the vacancies that may occur shall be fixed by recruits from among the backward classes is at present less than 50 percent the next appointment shall be given to a member of those classes. Backward class protect from social injustice and all from of social exploitation.

This was a historic step that changed the landscape of India's society. It challenged the long standing monopoly of a few and opened the government service to all. This was the first instance of caste based reservation in modern India. This is why Shahu Maharaj is often described as the father of modern-day reservation implementation in India and in particular area of his own kingdom of Kolhapur. The order had been passed at a time when Brahmins dominated economic and social life, education and all administrative

jobs. Lokmanya Tilak, in his editorials in the kesari newspaper, called this notification on undiplomatic and immature step and wondered if shahu chhatrapati had lost his mind. If this is what tilak felt, one can imagine the reaction of other brahmins. The Brahmins who dominated the administrative class were served affected by this move. Shahu Maharaj vehemently opposed caste discrimination and took many steps to abolish untouchability.

The Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj had received a liberal education, travelled extensively and was deeply moved by the caste exploitation and oppression of common folk all over India and his princely state, in particular. All this contributed to Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj ushering in a new era in Kolhapur's history. One of the triggers for his ground breaking decision to introduced reservation was an incident known as the vedokta controversy. In October 1899 the Chhatrapati was performing religious rituals in the panchaganga river, when he noticed that the priests were not chanting mantra's from the Vedas but from the Purana, which was quite unusual. The Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was aghast when the palace priests explained that only Brahmins had the right to perform 'Vedokta' rituals and since Marathas were 'Shudras' they couldn't perform rituals.

The period between the 1860s and 1920s has been described as the Indian Renaissance and was defined by the work of social reformers like Jyotiba Phule, Pandita Ramabai and Justice Ranade, who campaigned for the abolition of untouchability, the *purdah* system, *sati*, child marriage and for women's rights and illiteracy. Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was inspired by these visionaries and imbibed their progressive views. The idea of reservation for backward classes was first rooted in 1881 by Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, in his statement to the Hunter commission set up by British government to enquire into the status of primary and secondary education in India. It is believed that Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj was inspired by jyotiba phule, while implementing his own reservation policy in 1902. Shahu Maharaj was first to implement caste based reservation in the modern era of India.

He passed the compulsory primary education act of 1917 through which primary education was made compulsory to all irrespective of caste and creed. He also made education free for

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all and imposed a fine of Rs 1 on those who didn't follow this. He was first Indian ruler to do so. He laid great stress on women's education. In 1920, he established a free hostel named Prince Shivaji Maratha free boarding house. Shahu Maharaj had surveyed the employment records in his states, realizing that out of 71 employees in high positions, 60 were Brahmins and only 11 were bahun. Similarly in the private sector 44 of 52 employees were Brahmins and only 8 were from the bahun samaj. He announced 50 percent reservation for all bahun samaj in order to remove the imbalance in his administration. On 26 January 1950, when India chose to be governed by the constitution and when a great reformer, emancipation and legal genius like Ambedkar who had a relationship of mutual respect with Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, gave constitutional sanctity to the spirit of the 1902 notification.

When Shahu Maharaj ascended the throne in 1894, Brahmins held 67 of 71 posts (94.37 %) in the administrative department of the princely state. In the ruler's private administration, Brahmins held 4 of the 53 posts (87.79 %). The remaining posts in both departments were occupied by Non Brahmins like British officers, Anglo Indians Parsi and Prabhus. This was what Shahu Maharaj called the Brahmin bureaucracy. He discovered the irony that though this was a Maratha princely state, there was hardly any Maratha (Non Brahmin backward classes, including the Maratha, OBC's, untouchables, Muslims, Jains and Lingayats) in the administration.

After 1902 when he discovered that the Non Brahmin castes and communities did not have enough qualified candidates to claim the reserved jobs, he started a multi-pronged programme to extend free, universal and mandatory education. In 1917 he promulgated an act making primary education free and mandatory for every child in Kolhapur state. When he found that a student's hostel attached to the Rajaram high school and college, which is a vibrant institution today in Kolhapur, practiced an admission policy for students of all caste and communities only in theory and was in effect, open only to Brahmin students, Shahu Maharaj began his famous programme to set up hostels exclusively dedicated to particular castes and communities, several of which survivors and have contributed immensely to the cause of education among the backward classes.

These measures greatly changed the social and administrative profile of the princely state. In 1917 when the act making primary education free and compulsory was passed, Kolhapur had only 27 schools with 1,296 students. By the time he died in 1922 Shahu Maharaj had helped build 420 schools which admitted more than 22,000 students. When he took over the reins of the state the Rajaram high school and college had only 7.6 % students from the Non Brahmin castes. By 1922, this figure was 37.7 %. In the general administration, the percentage of employees from Non Brahmin castes went up from 5.63 % to 62.11 % in 1922. The backward classes accounted for 71.71 % of the staff in the private administration, up from a mere 13.1 % in 1894.

Ambedkar deployed different methods and refined the principle of affirmative action using his own scholarship but the impact the manifesto of shahu maharaj had and the principle of affirmative action in reflected might have deeply influenced him, 1902 document as an inspiration behind ambedkar's constitutional philosophy of reservation. Reservation is a system of affirmative action in India that provides historically disadvantaged groups representation in education, employment, government schemes, health, insurance, banking, foreign higher education, scholarships and politics.

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